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Flour and wheat in the Montana gold camp



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IN THE  
MONTANA GOLD  
CAMPS

1862--1870

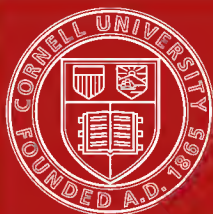
A Chapter in Pioneer Experiences and a Brief Discussion  
of the Economy of Montana in the  
Mining Days

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Dunstan---Printing and Stationery  
Missoula, Montana  
1918



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BECAUSE of the peculiar and prominent relation of wheat to the winning of the war, the writer has compiled this little study of early Montana economic conditions.

The story of wheat, like that of iron and coal, is less spectacular than Indian and grizzly bear fights, but it is all-important. We often speak of the "hardships of pioneers." Their great hardship was the problem met by all men who have made their own way since Adam ---the difficulty of finding enough to eat. It is hoped that these few pages will throw some light on the prosaic but dominant fact that "bread is the staff of life."



# FLOUR AND WHEAT IN THE MONTANA GOLD CAMPS 1862-1870

(The numbers in parentheses following references in the text refer to the notes at the end of the article.)

The pioneers of Montana like the early explorers of the New World, three centuries before, were looking for "treasure" rather than for bulky articles of smaller price no matter what may have been the aggregate value and greater utility of the latter. The fertile soil with its rank vegetation, the primeval forests with their untold riches, the great iron, copper, and coal deposits were all overlooked by these adventurous Sixteenth Century Europeans who were on the trail of gold. A good example of this spirit is reflected in the familiar story of the jeers heaped upon John and Sebastian Cabot by their irate home critics when they reported that though they found no gold in their expedition off Labrador the codfish were so thick that the ships were stopped by them and the voyage delayed. Yet the codfish industry of North America has for decades netted millions.

This contempt on the part of pioneers for what is really of greatest value is a commonplace. Had the gold seekers of the western mountains put their energy, their industry, their hardships into tilling the soil of Montana and adjacent regions their returns not only would have been immeasurably greater in the aggregate but their general average of wealth also would have been enhanced. In any normal year the products of Montana's farms and ranches now nearly equal the value of all the gold taken from her gravel during the sixties. We must admire the energy and the enterprise of the first of our pioneers, but not their judgment.

## Wheat and Flour at the Indian Missions

The aborigenes of western Montana, unlike those of the Dakotas, raised no grain. When Father Ravalli in the early forties arrived at St. Mary's Mission in the Bitter Roots even the flour for the sacramental bread had to be imported. The Indians of the prairie region of the eastern portion of what is now Montana lived largely on buffalo and other game. The mountain tribes of the west went

to the eastern plains for buffalo or hunted and fished at home. In order to live when game was scarce or when their buffalo expeditions were interrupted by the savage Blackfeet, berries, herbs, and roots were utilized. Even then these Flatheads, Shoshones, Kalispells, and other western Indians lived a life of privation and often even of starvation. Lewis and Clark tell how the famished Flatheads devoured raw, even to the entrails, a deer the white hunters killed. (1) Many other old travellers vouch for the miserable condition of these mountain tribes when, as often, game was not plentiful. (2)

A picture of the misery of the Montana mountain Indians before the missionaries arrived is given by a famous pioneer of the fifties. In 1855 Isaac Ingalls Stevens, governor of the old Washington Territory, which in his day also comprised what is now Idaho and Montana, wrote as follows: "Before the Missionaries came the Indians were a poor, miserable, half-starved race, with an insufficiency of food, and nearly naked: living upon fish, camash and other roots, and as the last extremity, upon pine moss. They were in utter misery and want. The whole time was occupied in providing for their bellies, which were rarely full." (3)

To save the starving Flatheads from this life Father De Smet in 1842 brought seed wheat to St. Mary's and taught the natives to plant and harvest it. Major Ronan, an old Indian agent, tells the story. "The following spring, 1842, the fathers sowed the first grain brought to the Bitter Root valley by Father De Smet from Fort Colville, and planted some potatoes. The first year's crop of both yielded rich, to the great enjoyment and delight of the Indians, who learned for the first time how to till the soil and force it to yield a manifold crop." (4)

The Indians now had wheat of their own but no mill in which to grind it. They boiled and served it in "various unpalatable ways." Having trouble in obtaining sacramental bread and wishing to help the Indians Father Ravalli in 1845 got a pair of millstones from Belgium and set up a mill at St. Mary's. The Indians by increasing their wheat crop became less dependent on game and their lives became less precarious. (5)

### Flour at the Gold Camps

When the Stuarts and Reese Anderson in 1858 made the discovery which started the gold rush to what is now



Montana and Idaho all the supplies other than game and lumber were packed into the gold camps. To the thousands of miners who flocked to Bannack and Virginia City in 1862, freighters brought provisions from the steamboat landings at Fort Benton or Cow Island, or overland by ox- and mule-team from Utah or the Missouri towns. The freight rates being from fifteen to twenty-five cents a pound the price of flour and other commodities was naturally very high. (6)

In 1862 Bannack was in its first year. Miners were crowding to the rich deposits on Grasshopper Creek, and Bannack, from an Indian hunting ground suddenly became a thriving city. Supplies were scarce. The road from Salt Lake by which flour was brought was some five hundred miles in length. It mounted the Continental Divide where snow was often deep, and then passed over the barren rolling prairie. From the steamboat landing at Fort Benton a similar wagon road led to the new camp. Because of the great expense of transportation and the risks involved, coupled with a small supply and a great demand, flour sold for a dollar a pound in Bannack that year. (7)

The following year, 1863, the price of flour was also beyond the wildest dreams of present-day board of trade cornerers. F. M. Thompson in November sold to Ex United States Senator W. A. Clark 261 pounds for \$208.80 and to A. J. Oliver 60 pounds of meal for \$18. (8) At Curry Gulch flour sold at \$28 per sack of 98 pounds in "gold dust" or \$56 in greenbacks. (9) Although the prices were not consistent they were all very high. Bread kept pace with flour. A pioneer, N. H. Webster, bought bread at Beaver Creek, between Bannack and Virginia City, in 1863 at the rate of \$2.50 for seven pounds. (10) A meal of "sour-dough bread, black coffee, and bad doughnuts universally cost a dollar," said Granville Stuart. (11)

It should be remembered that because of the Civil War wheat was unnaturally high even in the wheat states during the sixties. But the tedious and dangerous haul via boat or freighters, or both, made prices of bulky articles phenomenal in the gold camps. These prices were neither regular nor consistent. They were about what the traffic would bear. There were at first no markets or market quotations. A merchant who luckily received a consignment of goods charged what he could get. Segregated communities suffered for lack of competition.

Miners continued to arrive by the thousands and the demand thus increased. When the "diggings" at Bannack and Virginia City became less remunerative new ones were found at Helena and elsewhere. In August, 1864, flour made of Utah winter wheat was selling at Virginia City for \$28 a sack (98 pounds) and that made from spring wheat for \$24, wholesale. The quotation states that "retail prices would run from 10% to 25% higher." (12)

To illustrate the inconsistency of prices in these old days the following example is given. During the winter of 1864-5 J. G. C. Emerson bought flour in Virginia City for \$96 "in good clean gold dust." "I think," he writes, "that was all the money I had is the reason I got it so cheap." During the same season he bought flour at Salt Lake for \$7 and \$8 per hundred and on arrival at Fort Benton found it selling for \$20, "at which price we really thought we were stealing it." (13) Freight from Fort Benton to Missoula was eight cents a pound in the following year. (14) It must have been about the same from Fort Benton to Virginia City in 1864-5. This figure would make the cost "laid down" in Virginia City \$28 per hundred, for which the merchant in the above case received \$96.

These prices were asked and received at a time when wheat, according to pioneers, could be bought in the Bitter Root valley or at Walla Walla for \$5 a bushel, or about \$8 a hundred. (15) But the miners thought that Montana wheat made inferior flour. They were so far convinced of this superiority of the Utah commodity that they willingly paid a third more for it than for the local brands. But even if Montana flour had been popular there was not enough of it to satisfy the demand. Grist mills were few and it was some years before the increasing supply of local wheat could be utilized.

In 1864 occurred the famous Virginia City "Bread Riot." A bad winter with much snow had closed the roads to freighters. Many teams had started from Utah for the gold camps but were unable to get through. Flour was forced up to \$150 a hundred. Rioters seized hoarded supplies and so prevented absolute starvation. With spring came the flour trains and the "Bread Riot" was soon a mere matter of bitter memory. As these prices were unnatural and ephemeral no further discussion of the episode is necessary. The affair, however, well shows to what an

extent early Montana was dependent on flour, especially on Utah flour. (16)

Meanwhile the population of Montana was increasing. In 1864 she became a territory, being separated from Idaho. Although thousands of disappointed prospectors left the gold camps many permanent settlers arrived. Lieutenant Bradley claims there were 14,000 people at Alder Gulch (Virginia City and vicinity) in 1864, and that 8,000 were attracted to Helena in a single year. (17) Richardson, who visited the gold camps in 1865, estimated that there were 25,000 settlers in the Territory, and that the people were already agitating statehood, which honor, however, they did not gain for twenty-four years. (18) The famous pioneer missionary, Bishop Tuttle, says there were about 30,000 souls in the Territory when he arrived at Virginia City in 1867. (19)

The pioneer of the sixties had his advantages as well as his handicaps. Although flour and many other imported food-stuffs were high, meat seems to have been cheap. Buffalo were numerous on the plains, and antelope, deer, grouse, and other game was plentiful nearer the mining towns. In addition domestic animals were numerous. It was estimated by a visitor at Bannack in 1864-5, D. K. Thomas, that more than a third of the miners in the gold camps came overland with ox- and mule-teams. "The cheapest . . . food used in the mines was beef," wrote this traveller. "After their arrival the oxen were turned out to grass to fatten and were soon ready for beef." (20) Even though this observer be stating a general condition of the time, which can be doubted, it must be remembered that man can no more live on meat alone than on bread alone. Beef may have been reasonable in price at the mining centers but its competition did not seriously weaken the quotations on other necessities.

Many people were now coming to the new territory to farm as well as to mine. Disappointed miners also turned to the irrigation of the rich mountain valleys. Fabulous tales of the wealth to be made by supplying the miners with food, lumber, and tools were noised abroad. The Territory's agricultural record for 1866 was respectable when we remember that gold was the great objective of the time, and that even the wave of miners did not come till 1862. The Territorial Auditor reported on November 10 that 67,757 acres were under cultivation, that the value of horses and mules was \$271,466, and that of cattle, sheep,

and hogs \$546,302. (21) Of course this cultivated land was all irrigated, dry farming being a recent experiment in Montana.

Unfortunately the Auditor did not give the amount of grain produced during the year. But a news item in the "Montana Post" of September 15 of that year states, on we know not what authority, that 300,000 bushels of wheat were raised in Montana Territory during the season. This crop was all produced in the western mountain region, Madison, Beaverhead, Gallatin, Lewis and Clark, and Missoula counties. No attempt had as yet been made to till the great prairies of the Territory. Even a dozen years ago the old settlers looked askance at the temerity of the homesteaders who sought to plow the plains and attempt "dry farming." In 1866 the "Bad Lands," as eastern Montana was called, were not even considered fit for grazing. The Gallatin, Bitter Root, and Madison river valleys were found capable of producing enormous crops of grain, but no one thought of leaving the well watered vales to turn over the sod of the prairie. The gold camps being in the mountain regions of the Territory, the inhabitants naturally congregated there. The inhabited Montana of the sixties was the southwestern mountain region. Even in this section settlements were few and far between.

After the close of the Civil War in 1865 prices dropped materially in the East. Wheat tumbled radically. In Montana this decrease in the price of wheat products after 1866 is manifest. Although the building of local grist mills helped to lower the price of flour, still high values are found for those years. One pioneer, Wallace Milligan, records that at Blackfoot City in 1865 bread cost a dollar a loaf. (22) Another old settler, Cornelius Hedges, bought flour at Helena in the same year for a dollar a pound. (23) But the prices as a whole fell after the summer of 1865.

The value of flour like that of wheat varied greatly. If, as we know, grain from neighboring fields differ in quality, that from widely separated regions is apt to show even a more marked difference. The superior Salt Lake variety, so popular with the early Montanans, brought much more than eastern flour or that from the Montana mills. An old Alder Gulch merchant, E. W. McVeal, sold flour on April 20, 1865, all the way from 25c to 80c per pound. (24) From other sources we learn that the former was either Montana flour or that brought from St. Louis

and commonly called "States flour." The higher price was commanded by the famous "Salt Lake Choice." On August 26, 1865, J. S. Rockfellow, a Virginia City dealer, gave the wholesale price of various articles in the "Montana Post" of that date. He quoted no local flour. "Salt Lake Choice" was from \$27 to \$27.50 per 98-pound sack; "Salt Lake Common" was from \$18 to \$19, and "States flour" from \$20 to \$24.

With the year 1866 came hard times to the Montana pioneer. Prices fell, fell so far in fact, that a writer in the "Montana Post" of October 27 of that year stated that settlers were passing through the Territory "on hearing of the hard times." This same correspondent hoped that prices would again "go up." This bad state of affairs continued for some time. Prices dropped still lower. In the "Montana Post" of September 18, 1868, are notices of seventeen bankruptcies. The price of flour was visibly affected by these conditions.

One of the most valuable sources of information for the years 1866-7 is the newly-found "Worden Account Book," which was recently rescued from a Missoula dump-heap. In 1860 Frank L. Worden and Christopher P. Higgins started a general store at old Hell Gate, just west of the present city of Missoula. Here the travellers between Walla Walla and either Fort Benton or the mining camps stopped for provisions. The neighboring ranchers, of which there were few, and the fathers at St. Mary's Mission were also outfitted by these pioneer merchants. (25)

Worden's sales give a good idea of the retail prices of these years. On December 21, 1866, Father Ravalli bought wheat at \$3 per bushel. C. C. O'Keefe was charged \$3.25 for wheat and J. F. Higgins 50c for bran and \$1.20 for oats on February 8, 1867. On March 22 the firm bought wheat at \$4 and on the same day sold some at \$5.85 per bushel, but whether or not it was the same grain we do not know. Many such entries can be found under date in this old book.

Not many entries for flour are made by Worden. On October 1, 1866, one sack was sold for \$11 and on November 15 another brought but \$7. But no information is given as to the quality of the flour in either case. It is unsafe to make strict comparisons on such meager data. But one thing is at least noticeable, flour was no longer sold from \$24 to \$150 per sack. In fact Bishop Tuttle

tells us that he bought flour at Virginia City in July, 1867, for \$25 a barrel. (26)

Other reasons than hard times and reaction from war conditions were responsible for this fall in the price of flour. The Montana mills were by this time partly satisfying the local demand. The Territorial Treasurer in 1868 stated that there were seven flour mills in Montana. The annual value of their output was estimated to be \$2,680,000. (27) However, it seems doubtful if so much flour could have been ground in Montana in 1868, for the federal census of 1870 gives the flour ground in the Territory from June 1, 1869, to June 1, 1870, to be put \$365,839. (28) But in either case the amount was considerable. In fact, Senator Clark considered that by 1869 the Montana mills were able to satisfy the local demand for flour. (29) Nevertheless from the statements of others it appears that large quantities of Utah flour were still imported. Even today Minnesota and Dakota flour is shipped into Montana in spite of the fact that train loads of Montana wheat are sent to the eastern markets.

That our own mills were grinding large amounts of flour we learn from another contemporary source. "Prices for Gallatin XX [are] ranging from \$7 to \$8 . . .", runs an item in the "Montana Post" of September 11, 1868, and continues: "The importations from Salt Lake are small compared with former years, owing to the fact that the young Territory is becoming nearly self-sustaining in the chief articles of consumption." Indeed, the federal census of 1870 gives Montana seven flouring mills, capitalized at \$92,000. They ground during the year ending June 1, 1870, wheat to the value of \$271,090, the resulting product being valued at \$365,839. The Territory was credited with 177,535 bushels of spring and 3,649 bushels of winter wheat. (30) To consume this flour were 18,306 whites, 1,040 Chinese, 183 negroes, and 19,457 Indians. (31) But it is doubtful if the Indians or the Chinese were great bread eaters.

According to the census of 1870, which lists the number of farmers as 2,111, Montana was becoming more largely agricultural. The number of improved acres was stated to be 84,674. The total value of the farm land was \$729,193, and the implements and machinery \$145,438. The average size of the farms of the Territory was 164 acres. Sixty and seven-tenths per cent of the farm land was improved. (32) Government statistics are not in-

fallible. But that the nascent agricultural industry of Montana was respectable in 1870 is evident.

It will seem strange to us that Montana flour was so long considered inferior to that which was imported. But even today there are many who claim that our own wheat is "too soft" to make first-class flour. However true this may be the pioneers were certainly prejudiced against the local crop. Despite the fact that the Utah wheat like the Montana product of that day was raised entirely by irrigation it brought a much higher price than that produced locally. The Salt Lake wheat also had another advantage over Montana in that it matured earlier. At times the Utah flour would actually arrive in the Montana towns before the local wheat crop was even harvested. Commenting on the arrival of 600 sacks of Utah flour in Deer Lodge the editor of the "New Northwest" of the latter city on August 26, 1870, said: "It is rather novel to see flour of this year's grain trundled up here from Utah, when the harvest of our own valleys is as yet uncut."

The data showing how the price of flour decreased from 1864 to 1870 and how the Utah flour was valued compared with the local product are as follows: (33)

Year	1864	1865	1866	1868	1870
"Salt Lake Choice"....	\$28	\$27-27.50	\$20	\$12.00	\$11.00
"Salt Lake Common" 24		18-19.00	....	....	....
"Gallatin XX" .....		20-24.00	12	7.50	9-9.50
"States" .....		20-24.00	....	....	....

The above are all wholesale prices. The quotations state that the retail prices would be from ten to twenty-five per cent higher. The unit in each case was the 98-pound sack, commonly called the "hundred." These figures are all for the month of August save those for 1870, which are for September. The comparison should therefore be fair save that the wheat crop may have varied from year to year. But it must be remembered that both the Montana and the Utah grains were grown under irrigation, the yield from which is much more uniform than dry farming.

### Prices in General During the Sixties

To show that flour was not the only commodity to gradually decrease during the sixties the following figures

giving the prices of a large number of necessities for the corresponding years are given: (34)

	1864	1866	1868	1870
Bacon (per lb.)....\$	.50	\$ .50-52	\$ .18-20	\$ .35-37
Ham (per lb.).....	....	.55	.28-35	.37-38
Sugar (100 lbs.)..	65.00	38.00-42	30.00-40	21.00-25
Coffee (per lb.)....	.65	1.75-2.75	.42-50	.33-35
Cheese (per lb.)..	.85	.69-70	.33-35	.20-30
Butter (per lb.)....	.85	1.00	.30-35	.50
Salt (100 lbs.).....	....	15.00	8.00-9	8.00
Cornmeal " ,	20.00	12.50	11.00-13	12.00
Prunes (lb.) .....	....	.55-60	....	.25
Peaches (2 doz. *)	....	16.00-	13.50	11.00
Corn (2 doz.cans)	....	22.00	....	11.00
Tomatoes " ....	....	24.00	13.50	8.25
Beans (lb.) .....	....	.25	....	.17-22
Coal oil (gal.)....	7.00	3.00	2.25 2.50	1.15
Nails (100 lbs.)....	50.00	28.00	....	12.50
Whiskey (gal.)....	4.00-8	5.00-10	4.00-7.50	2.75-4.50
Shovels (doz.).....	....	40.00-45	20.00-21	18.00-20
Picks (doz.).....	....	75.00	60.00	66.00

\* Cans.

All of the above articles save one or two were cheaper in 1870 than in 1864 or 1866 and most of them were cheaper in 1870 than in 1868. The manufactured goods, all of which were made in the East or Central West, were reduced in price because of the completion of the Union Pacific in 1869. Instead of having a wagon haul of some 1,700 miles from the Missouri or Kansas towns, the teamsters could now meet the railroad at Ogden or some other point on the railway and by a journey of less than 500 miles could reach the gold camps. Freight was therefore much less. Hardware, canned goods, cornmeal, salt, coffee, sugar, beans, coal oil, and whiskey come in this class. Freight was thus one cause for the drop in Montana prices during the sixties. It has been stated above that Lee's surrender was another cause.

But perhaps one of the greatest reasons for this phenomenon was the fact that by 1870 the placer diggings were becoming exhausted and the gambling spirit was disappearing. The first wave of miners wanted gold. They risked everything for it. They did not higgler over price. They had little economic backing and the merchant was forced to "grubstake" or advance them goods



with no collateral and little confidence. These high prices represented the dealer's insurance against risk. This condition is a characteristic feature of pioneer economy, especially of a mining society. The same problem and the same situation later existed in South Africa and Alaska.

The above paragraphs have dealt with prices alone. That prices were higher in Montana and other far-western communities long distant from manufacturing centers, to which transportation was expensive and uncertain, than in the East was logical. Statistics, however, prove that prices of necessities fell after 1865 throughout the United States. Using the year 1860, the year before the outbreak of the Civil War, as the base or 100, the rise in wages and wholesale prices in the Eastern states was as follows:  
(35)

Year	Wages	Cost of Living
1860	100	100
1861	100	111
1862	100	123
1863	109	137
1864	120	163
1865	141	175
1866	153	172
1867	172	164
1868	167	165
1869	174	163
1870	175	157
1871	178	148

From the above table it can be seen that in the East prices rose steadily between 1860 and 1865, the year of the collapse of the Confederacy. Thereafter they quite uniformly and quite gradually fell. In Montana the same course did not fail to manifest itself. There was this difference, however, that when the Territory was first settled, in 1862 and 1863, prices were higher than in the maximum year in the East, 1865. Yet this phenomenon can be traced to a few natural causes. The miners came by waves during the first few months. Supplies of food and tools were limited. Only a few hundred whites were in what is now Montana before the gold discoveries, and they were mostly fur-traders or soldiers. Lines of traffic were not then well established and goods were hard to get. Later when the importers had the situation in hand prices fell. With this exception Montana prices kept pace quite regularly with those in the East as far as the general level was concerned. As no data on Montana prices before

1862 could be found we have no antebellum standard to work upon. This fact precludes a complete comparison of Montana prices with those of the East.

### Prices and Wages

The table given above shows that Civil War prices mounted earlier and much faster than wages, but that the latter eventually equalled and ultimately surpassed the former. That wages in the Montana of the sixties were high can easily be proved. Whether high wages are a cause or an effect of high prices need not detain us here. But the all-important point that wages must roughly equal prices is a self-evident fact. The Montana of the gold days was no exception to this rule.

As gold mining was so alluring, and even in some cases so remunerative, few of the first pioneers cared to enter the safer but more prosaic fields of merchandising, freighting, or farming. So seductive was the chase for gold and so scarce the supply of laborers in 1862 that M. H. Lott and David Dunkleburg made \$30 a day each whip-sawing lumber for sluice boxes near Big Hole. (36) N. H. Webster states that while in Bannack in October, 1863, he was offered \$250 a month as bartender, but that he refused to consider the offer. (37)

During the heyday of Virginia City placer mining, laborers in the "diggings" received from \$5 to \$15 per day, according to one pioneer (38), and from \$8 to \$10 "in gold dust," according to another. (39) But it is not stated whether board in either case was found. Seth Bawden, an early miner, received in 1866 from \$6 to \$8 a day mining at Nelson Gulch. (40)

For the most complete data on wages in 1866 and 1867 we must again turn to the neatly written pages of the "Worden Account Book." Worden and Company employed several clerks and "roustabouts" at their Hell Gate store. The following items appear under date as follows:

December 31, 1866—

"To J. W. Brown, 16 days services @ 25\$ mo.....	\$15.38"
"To James Donovan, 17 days service @ 50\$ mo.....	\$32.69"
"To N. E. Semavoy, 17 days services @ 75\$ mo.....	\$49.04"
"To Jno. M. Cay, 6½ days services @ 6\$.....	\$39.00"

January 30, 1867—

"To R. Mesh, 1 days work.....	\$3.50"
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March 30, 1867—

“To Jas. P. Reinhard, 3 mos. services.....\$450.00”  
“To A. H. Ross, 3 mos. services.....\$225.00”

April 8, 1867—

“To Perry Eldredge, 5½ mos. @ 30\$ herding cattle..\$165”

May 31, 1867—

“To Mill a-c services painting, 1 1-3 mos. @ 100\$..\$133.33”

The above wages seem very low for the gold days. Hell Gate was, however, a ranching rather than a mining community and consequently wages may have been lower there. But the competition of the nearby mines would have tended to neutralize this difference. If wages were not phenomenal with Worden, board was. The item of board must always be considered when discussing wages. A. H. Ross received \$75 a month, but in addition his employer paid his board bill which was extremely high. Under date of January 14, 1867, this entry appears, “To D. Pattee 1 week board of Ross \$14.” The same item appears on January 12 and February 4. But on February 25 board was reduced to \$12 per week, where it remained till the record closes on May 31.

From Virginia City on July 27, 1867, Bishop Tuttle wrote his wife that servant girls would receive from \$40 to \$50 a month “if they could be found.” (41) Later on he asserted that Chinese “chambermen” were given \$60 a month in gold. (42)

By 1870 the general fall of Montana prices and the decrease of gold production was accompanied by a lowering of wages. In the “Helena Herald” of March 7, 1871, appeared an open letter from the hand of Governor James M. Ashley wherein he held out great allurements to prospective settlers. He promised “common laborers” from \$3 to \$5 a day and mechanics from \$5 to \$8. (43) These figures are hardly the incomes of the early sixties. The wages of Montana workingmen continued to fall. The Territory was no longer the primitive community of the sixties. In his “Centennial Address” W. A. Clark said that miners in Montana at that time (1876) were given from \$3 to \$5 a day, farm hands \$50 a month, and female help \$20 to \$30 a month. He also announced that hotel board was from \$6 to \$8 a week. (44)

## Interest Rates During the Sixties

Interest rates are considered fairly indicative criteria of prosperity. When prices in general are high, interest is high. Flush or slack times effect both prices and interest. Interest is simply the price paid for the use of money. In fat years money can be easily and profitably invested. The demand for it is thus increased and interest goes up. Another serious item which influences interest rates is risk. Everyone knows that safe investments, such as government bonds or state warrants, give a low rate while money loaned to precarious enterprises brings a large rate. It is said that the Pilgrim Fathers borrowed money at from forty to sixty per cent to pay off their obligations contracted in hiring the Mayflower and purchasing supplies.

In the Montana of the sixties business was flush and prices were high. But despite the large fortunes made by a comparative few of the miners the usual investment was precarious. Neither was there much surplus capital in the Territory. Many a miner with no credit but his apparent honesty was "grub-staked" by the merchants who in turn borrowed of such parties as had money. The whole economic fabric thus rested on a none too secure foundation. If the miner "struck it rich" he could settle with the merchants and the latter could afford to pay the high interest rate. If the miner was unlucky—all parties suffered.

Cornelius Hedges says that during the boom at Trout Creek in 1865 money was borrowed at the rate of 1 per cent per day. (45) Another pioneer, A. M. Holter, built a saw mill near Helena in this same year. He was forced to pay 10 per cent a month for the capital necessary to start the mill. (46) Nevertheless the demand for sluice-box lumber was so great that he prospered.

These instances may seem unbelievable. But it must be remembered that the parties receiving the loan had no collateral. The solid business man with a stock of goods did not pay so much, but his yearly interest was considerable. Bishop Tuttle in 1868 sent east for money with which to build a church at Helena. He decided to defer building and loaned the money, \$3,300, to a local merchant at 25 per cent. (47) But all business men did not pay even this much. In the quiet Hell Gate region the well established firm of Worden and Higgins in 1866 bor-

rowed money from two different private parties for 10 per cent per annum. (48) They seem to have been fortunate as compared with other borrowers of the time.

From the figures given in the foregoing pages we may judge that Montana by 1870 was getting down to more normal American conditions. The sixties, therefore, almost witnessed the passing of the primitive economic status of the Territory. Prices and wages never have been those of New England but they were becoming "more civilized" if one takes into account her handicap in transportation which naturally added to the dealer's cost. The first railroad to cross the Montana border arrived in 1880. This fact had a great influence in retarding the solid growth of the Territory.

War is upon us again. Wheat and flour are once more approaching Civil War prices. Flour, "the staff of life," is, as in 1865, almost prohibitive in price and its use is justly restricted. The Montanan of the sixties paid what was asked by the local merchant. He does not seem to have complained, save during the "Bread Riot." But that was an abnormal situation. The pioneers living today who passed through the placer mining days give their experiences with gleeful reminiscence. May we do the same when we speak of present day hardships in the future.

## NOTES

- 1 "The Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806," Robert Gould Thwaites, Editor, 8 vols., (New York, 1904), vol. II, p. 355; vol. III, p. 18.
- 2 See the Reverend Samuel Parker, A. M., "Journal of an Exploring Tour Beyond the Rocky Mountains . . . in the Years 1835, '36, and '37 . . ." (2nd ed., Ithaca, N. Y., 1840), pp. 104-5. See also Peter John De Smet, S. J., "Western Missions and Missionaries, A Series of Letters," (n p., n. d.), p. 282.
- 3 Quoted in De Smet, "Western Missions and Missionaries," p. 284.
- 4 Peter Ronan, "Historical Sketch of the Flathead Indian Nation From the Year 1813 to 1890," (Helena, Mont., 1890), p. 31.
- 5 L. S. Palladino, S. J., "Indian and White in the Northwest or a History of Catholicity in Montana," (Baltimore, 1894), p. 46. These old millstones are now on exhibition in the Montana State Historical and Miscellaneous Library at Helena. They are fifteen inches in diameter.
- 6 See H. A. Trexler, "The Missouri River Route," in the Missouri Historical Review, Jan. 1918, pp. 67-80; also "The Overland Route," by the same, in *Ibid.*, April, 1918, pp. 145-162.
- 7 Granville Stuart, "Historical Sketch of Deer Lodge County, Valley, and City," in Contributions of the Montana Historical Society, vol. II, pp. 122-3.
- 8 Martha Edgerton Plassman, "Montana's Civil War Prices," in Daily Missoulian, Aug. 26, 1917.
- 9 D. B. Weaver, "Early Days in Emigrant Gulch," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. VII, p. 79. During the sixties greenbacks (United States Notes) were at one time as low as 30% the value of gold dust in Montana. See H. A. Trexler, "Gold Dust and Greenbacks in Early Montana," *Overland Monthly*, July, 1917, pp. 63-7.
- 10 "Journal of N. H. Webster," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. III, p. 327.
- 11 Oral statement of Mr. Stnart.
- 12 "Montana Post," Aug. 27, 1864.
- 13 J. G. C. Emerson, "A Story of His Experiences in Montana in 1864," as dictated to A. J. Noyes (in Mont. State Hist. and Misc. Library), p. 2.
- 14 See note 6, above.
- 15 Gilbert Benedict says wheat was \$5 a bushel in the Bitter Root valley in 1864. "Gilbert Benedict's Account," as dictated to A. J. Noyes, (in Mont. State Hist. and Misc. Library), p. 6. Another pioneer states that in this year he bought wheat at Walla Walla for \$5 a bushel and sold it at Blackfoot City, Mont., for \$45, paying the teamsters seventeen cents a pound for freighting it. "Amos Calvin's Narrative," as dictated to A. J. Noyes (In Mont. State Hist. and Misc. Library), p. 2.
- 16 Accessible accounts of this episode can be found in W. A. Clark, "Centennial Address on the Origin, Growth, and Resources of Montana. Delivered at the Philadelphia Centennial, Oct. 11, 1876," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. II, p. 54; and in A. J. Noyes edition of Thomas J. Dimsdale's "Vigilantes of Montana," (Helena, Mont., 1915), pp. 171-2.
- 17 "Journal of Lieutenant James H. Bradley," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. II, p. 150.

- 18 Albert D. Richardson, "Beyond the Mississippi, "rom the Great River to the Great Ocean," (Hartford, Conn., 1867), pp. 486-7.
- 19 D. S. Tuttle, D. D., L. L. D., "Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop," (New York, 1906), p. 119.
- 20 D. K. Thomas, "Wild Life in the Rocky Mountains or the Lost Million Dollar Gold Mine," (n. p., 1917), p. 168.
- 21 "Montana Post," Nov. 24, 1866.
- 22 "Wallace Milligan's Account," as dictated to A. J. Noyes, (in Mont. State Hist. and Misc. Library), p. 6.
- 23 Cornelius Hedges, "In Memoriam (to Charles Rumley), in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. III, p. 24.
- 24 "E. W. McVeal's Ledger," p. 98. This MS book opens on March 4, 1865. It comprises 243 pages. (In Mont. State Hist. and Misc. Library). Another Virginia City merchant sold a sack of flour on June 10, 1865, for \$20. "Tom Baker's Account Book," under date. This MS record covers the period from Aug. 5, 1863, to Dec. 31, 1865. (in Ibid.).
- 25 See Captain John Mullan, "Miners and Traveller's Guide to Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, . . ." (New York, 1865), p. 14. The old MS "Worden Account Book" is now in the possession of Mr. Worden's daughter, Mrs. J. M. Dixon of Missoula, Mont.
- 26 Tuttle, "Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop," p. 36.
- 27 "Report of W. G. Barkly, Territorial Treasurer, for the Year ending July 1, 1868," in the Montana Post of Sept. 18, 1868.
- 28 "A Compendium of the Ninth Census of the United States, For the Year ending June 1, 1870," (Washington, 1872), p. 860.
- 29 W. A. Clark, "Centennial Address," p. 54. Clark also states that in 1869 40,000 barrels of flour were ground in the Territory.
- 30 "A Compendium of the Ninth Census," pp. 694, 860.
- 31 "A Compendium of the Ninth Census," pp. 20-1.
- 32 "A Compendium of the Ninth Census," pp. 594, 688-90. Eight thousand and thirty of the people of Montana were engaged in "manufacturing, mining, and industry," 1,233 in "trade and transportation," and 2,674 in "professional and personal service." Ibid., p. 594.
- 33 The figures for 1864 are from the "Montana Post" of Aug. 27, 1864; those for 1865 are from the same for Aug. 26, 1865; those for 1866 from the same for Aug. 25, 1866. These are all Virginia City prices. The figures for 1868 are from the "Montana Post" of Aug. 14, 1868. The "Post" was by this time being published in Helena. The quotations for 1870 are from the "New Northwest" of Deer Lodge for Sept. 30, 1870. There is no reason why the prices in these three towns should have been materially different.
- 34 See note 33, above.
- 35 Quoted from various statistics by Richard T. Ely, "Outlines of Economics," (Revised Ed., New York, 1914), p. 340.
- 36 Noyes edition of Dimsdale's "Vigilantes of Montana," p. 199.
- 37 "Journal of N. H. Webster," p. 224.
- 38 Granville Stuart, oral statement.
- 39 Lyman E. Munson, "Pioneer Life in Montana," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. V, p. 226. Mr. Munson was at one time Associate Justice of the Montana Supreme Court.

- 40 "Seth Bowden's Narrative," as dictated to A. J. Noyes (in Mont. Hist. and Misc. Library), p. 3. Teachers of the sixties received what will be thought poor wages, considering the price of flour and other necessities. Mrs. Herndon received \$125 a month for teaching "the higher grades" at Virginia City in 1864. Another teacher, a Mrs. Farley, got but \$75 for doing the primary work. Mrs. Sarah Raymond Herndon. "The Pioneer Public Schools of Montana," in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. V, p. 198. These were certainly not enormous "real wages" for a time when board was prohibitive. Granville Stuart told me that in the early sixties he paid \$21 a week for board and "slept in his own blankets." But all board bills were not so high.
- 41 "Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop," p. 136.
- 42 "Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop," p. 170.
- 43 Quoted in Contrib. Mont. Hist. Society, vol. VI, p. 249.
- 44 "Centennial Address," pp. 50, 58-9.
- 45 "In Memorium (to Charles Rumley)," p. 24.
- 46 A. M. Holter, "Pioneer Lumbering in Montana," in Contrib. Hist. Society of Mont., vol. VIII, p. 261.
- 47 "Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop," p. 220.
- 48 MS "Worden Account Book," p. 163, under date of Dec. 31, 1866.









